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Fear and Dread in the Middle East

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Introduction

Fear can prompt the mind and the imagination. Dread paralyzes them. Both emotions inhibit logical thinking and deliberate decision. That truth holds for nations as well as persons. A singular trait of today's world is the odd mix of fear and dread that holds sway in America, Europe and the Middle East. It pervades the thinking of political elites and popular sentiment alike. The implications for the intricate, layered politics of the region are unsettling.

Fear, of course, is the hallmark of interstate relations. Fear of attack above all. Military threats are usually readily identifiable, immediate, and concrete. They can be existential, too. This is so in the general sense that conflict situations are ubiquitous in a semi-anarchic international system, and in the more specific sense that a given party may attack at some unpredictable time for reasons that are now unknowable with means not correctly estimated. Moreover, the threat may be indirect. It could take the form of ideological subversion whether by agency or by example. Existential and indirect threats are notable for not being resoluble by focused action taken against a clear target. They gnaw at you as well as frighten you. That produces dread. Dread can be understood as free floating fear.

Since the end of WW II, the Middle East has lived with war—anticipating it, engaging in it, dealing with its aftermath. Political instability—often associated with the machinations of outside parties—has been its concomitant. Chronic regime instability adds to dread for rulers. The two are endemic in the region. The number and variety of forces in one's environment that can endanger rulers is exceptional. In addition to hostile neighbors, they have included the pan-movements of Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism (along with the Iranian led Shi'ite revival); the Palestinian diaspora as refugee community, as PLO, as cause; and the growing intrusion into the region of the United States as patron of Israel, political actor and military presence.

Their interconnection feeds a pervasive anxiety among rulers as to their ability to shape events, secure interests and, ultimately, hold onto power. Vulnerability to coups from within or sponsored from abroad, to transnational ideologies, or to terrorism is acute. It is exacerbated by worries about the possible second-order effects stemming from events outside their borders, including policy shifts in distant Washington over which a leader has little or no influence.

A scanning of the political horizon illuminates their predicament. Direct military threats are low, by regional standards. Insofar as local actors are concerned, there are two perceived sources of danger. One is Israel. It menaces Lebanon via Hezbollah and it threatens air strikes against Iran to prevent the Islamic Republic's acquiring nuclear weapons. Its readiness to assault Hamas in

Gaza is in the category of indirect threats to others insofar as it inflames popular anger that can blame inert local elites for their fellow Arabs' dire straits.

Yet, Arab states have zero leverage on Israel which acts with the impunity that unqualified American backing permits. Iran's nuclear potential arouses fears among some Sunni regimes (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf principalities above all) who envisage themselves being targeted at some point down the road, even if it were to take the form of coercive diplomacy rather than overt threats of aggression. The principal aggressive power in the Middle East is the United States, objectively speaking.

America has invaded Afghanistan, invaded and occupied Iraq, growls menacingly at Iran, instigated the Ethiopian invasion and occupation of Somalia while itself striking at Islamist leaders there, collaborated with Israel in the 2006 Lebanon War II, and readied Fatah militia for a coup against the Hamas government that was foiled by the latter's preemptive move.

Only Israel has been able to have a say on what America does; only Israel can approach security matters now and in the future in the expectation that it can inflect American calculations and actions.

From the vantage-point of the United States' Arab allies, the overall picture is disconcerting. They do not, and cannot, control their own fate. This is not due to America's overwhelming might *per se*. Rather, it is the consequence of aggressive American policies: in encouraging Israeli bellicosity; in bolstering militant elements in Teheran through its confrontational policies; and by its stirring strife in Iraq that feeds both Sunni salafist militancy and Shiite self-assertion.

The three spheres intersect with Iran as the center. Surrounded by the United States' forces in Afghanistan to the East, in Iraq to the West, and in the Gulf to the south, the Iranians have concluded that their security dictates doing two things that disturb the region: pursuing the nuclear option, and building external alliances with groups that can bedevil the Unites States, while causing trouble for local governments, Hezbollah and Hamas. Strong evidence that Washington intends to keep substantial forces in place in all three locations indefinitely deepens Teheran's distrust and reinforces the dedication to create countervailing assets. The prospect of Iran becoming a nuclear power, in some minimal sense, causes all the more disquiet for its Arab neighbors by provoking possible American and/or Israeli preventive strikes. For that radical action would guarantee a more hostile Iran bent on reconstituting its nuclear capability—and, perhaps, take its revenge against the United States' allies—who happen to be Sunni, and Arab. Such hostility could take multiple, unconventional forms.

Indirect, non-military threats of diverse kinds feed fears in Riyadh, Kuwait and other places in the Gulf. They do so farther afield in Amman and Cairo as well. Iran is worrying because it is seen as the inspiration for, and champion of a resurgent Shi'ism. American success in toppling the Ba'ath regime in Iraq cleared the way for the Shi'ites to supplant the Sunnis as the dominant force in Mesopotamia after 1,300 years of subservience. The historic shift could tilt the balance between Islam's two sects across the region. Or so Sunni rulers fear.

How this might manifest itself is unclear; what is obvious, though, is how salient that eventuality is in the minds of Sunni rulers. One possible tangible manifestation is for Iran to stir unrest among Shi'ite minorities around the Gulf. Another, already noticeable, is for Iran to lend tangible support to a Shi'ite political formation such as Hezbollah vying for power against Sunnis as in Lebanon (there, it is a three-way contest with Christian factions). The effects fall mainly in the realm of the intangible, but intangibles count where the subjective definition of interest is closely tied to status, image and psychological advantage. There is the additional apprehension of tactical alliances between Iran and militant Sunni groups challenging the current power-holders. Just that kind of support for Hamas contributed to its victories, electoral and military, over Fatah in Palestine. In a

conjectured Shi'ite/Sunni struggle for political dominance, indirect methods for weakening or subverting the other become an integral part of the worrying situation. There is no Westphalian Treaty in force in the Middle East.

The Iranian dimension of the Middle East's forbidding security environment highlights the intersection between conventional state rivalry and ideological contests where transnational and supranational forces come into play. al-Qaeda's threat is different in this respect. al-Qaeda does not have a formal political location since its ejection from Afghanistan. There is no address to which threats or demarches can be sent. Whatever remains of the Osama bin-Laden organization haunts the Afghan-Pakistan border, but for all practical purposes it may as well be anywhere. Whatever the condition of its leadership, the movement's acolytes and copy-cats can be everywhere or nowhere. The tangible threat to established regimes comes from home-grown militants: elements of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; terrorist cells in Saudi Arabia bent on toppling the House of Saud; and analogous groups in Jordan. Their counterparts have put the Algerian government under siege for years. The very amorphousness of these menacing forces makes them all the more frightening. For one cannot know with any certainty their strength, their ties to sensitive state organs or their external affiliations. Uncertainty adds to a sense of dread.

Implications

1. The existence of multiple threats—tangible/intangible, direct/indirect, state based or not—generates diffuse feelings of vulnerability.
2. Cloudy time-frames as to when each might mature and become overt adds to the uncertainty
3. The reality that key elements in the security equation lay entirely beyond one's political or diplomatic reach, i.e. the United States and Israel, leads to a sense of impotence. The intricate intersections among threats and the difficulty of plotting all possible interactions complicate decision-making. Example: Saudi Arabia's tacit approval of the Israeli onslaught on Hezbollah based on a calculus that Iran and its inspiration of Shiites was a serious danger proved highly counter productive in both aggravating relations with Iran and losing the royal family's credibility among a slice of its Sunni populace that saw in Nasrullah an Arab hero.
4. An outcome of the above is *cognitive dissonance*. That is to say, leaders' beliefs, perceived interests, and accustomed modes of action cannot readily be brought into congruence. They can not reach goals—security for their regimes - thinking as they have been and acting as they have been. Moreover, mere exertion is likely to be unavailing since they lack the means to master their military, political and ideational environment.
5. Due to the above, they live in a state of frustration. Frustration compounded with a multiplicity of diverse fears leads to dread.
6. There are four responses to being in a perpetual state of frustrated cognitive dissonance: *spastic action, paralysis, reiteration or innovative initiative*. (A fifth, *denial,* is pathological for Middle Eastern governments who live a maelstrom of threat; denial is the characteristic behavior of European leaders, as discussed below).
7. *Spastic* action is ruled out on a number of grounds: the threats do not present clear targets; the means do not exist (Sunni Arab states could not take preventive military action against Iran, although they are tempted by the idea of the Americans doing it); and they are inherently cautious by virtue of temperament and political circumstance. In addition, spastic action is more likely when there is a manifest, immediate threat.
8. *Paralysis* is not a choice. It is a condition stemming from a combination of discerning no feasible measures to take, the cumulative effect of failed prior efforts—the fatalism of fatigue, and inadequate will that can derive from either irreconcilable differences among members of a government or a paramount leader's limited self-confidence.

9. *Reiterative* action is most common. In the absence of compelling new ideas, in the face of intractable problems, and constrained by the presence of more powerful actors, the psychologically and politically easiest thing to do is more of the same—whatever set of policies compose the 'same.'
10. *Innovative initiative* requires fresh thinking, the mustering of willpower and the ability to execute skillfully. It also requires having a fine sense of the possible. The Saudi led Arab League initiative in 2006 grounded on an avowed readiness to recognize the state of Israel is the most noteworthy example of a constructive diplomatic effort taken within the bounds that conditions permit. In and of itself, the proposal could not alter the fundamental configuration of forces. It did, though, lay down markers that could facilitate a negotiated set of agreements were there a shift in thinking in Washington and Jerusalem. An analogous much needed initiative today is a declaration from Arab states that air strikes against Iran by anyone would be imprudent, and calling for comprehensive discussions among interested parties aiming at a 'grand bargain.'

The United States

In our terminology, America is in a state of exaggerated fear. It has been there since 9/11. Its features are: a sense of vulnerability out of proportion to actual threats; an inflation of what harm others—al-Qaeda-like terrorist groups, Iran—could do the country or its core interests; an unrealistic risk assessment as to the probability of attack; a 'circle the wagons' mentality; a tendency to take a Manichean view of governments and persons; and a proclivity for impulsive, violent action. All are understandable, common reactions to grievous, surprising injury. It is the fear reflex—as the adrenaline rush prompts one to fight or flee. In the United States, it has become institutionalized through policies, rhetoric and engagements. The mobilization of the body's resources (corporeal or politic) can be healthy where the danger remains real and imminent. By contrast, when the danger is strictly conjectural, a heightened state of readiness can have negative consequences. Straining the body's capabilities indefinitely takes its toll. Furthermore, it impedes the sort of deliberative thought processes needed for forming and sustaining a strategy to deal with complex problems over time.

The benefits of a powerful, quasi-instinctive response were evident in Afghanistan. There, decisive American action overthrew the Taliban and evicted the al-Qaeda leadership. Military action was accompanied by decisive diplomacy that won Pakistan's collaboration, valuable concessions in Central Asian republics, and the acquiescence of Putin's Russia. A deliberative follow-up strategy was not forthcoming, though. There was no conception of how to fit the pieces of Afghanistan's fractured society into a coherent polity or of what a reasonable American, and Western, contribution to such a process looked like. One still does not exist. The unspoken political premises implicit in the initial, hasty military action never were brought into focus and analyzed critically. Emergency response behavior thereby dictated whatever strategy was implemented.

Afghanistan 's state of indeterminacy leaves the United States with an open-ended commitment linked to a vague image of an optimal outcome. The end-point is beyond the horizon. The psychological impact is to transform the sense of relief produced by immediate success into anxiety. The anxiety has two points of reference: turbulent conditions inside the country that dampen hopes for an early exit while continuing to impose costs; and recrudescence of the threat posed by the remnants of al-Qaeda and, secondarily, the Taliban. The latter are symbolized by Osama bin Laden's survival. His periodic tapes, along with those of al-Zawahiri, are more than irritating if less than infuriating (except for former CIA operatives in the area). Consequently, Americans feel the dual frustrations of a never-ending struggle and living with a threat whose amplitude they are unable to gauge. In other words, uncertainty and a diminished sense of national prowess. That medley of emotions borders on dread.

Dread is fed by the fact of being stuck in a place that is alien in terms of culture, religion and ethnicities. So, not only is the threat novel and difficult to comprehend but the means for extirpating it are not evident. Moreover, it is likely to be around indefinitely. A condition of anxious indeterminacy has become a constant.

Iraq reproduces these effects by several multiples. The costs, ambiguous conditions, fuzzy purposes, absence of a clear exit strategy and an alien environment cut much deeper into the national psyche. The picture is all the more sinister for the array of enemies—actual or suspect—that Americans perceive there: *inter alia* al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, indigenous Islamist Sunni militants, Moqtada al-Sadr's avowedly anti-American Mahdi 'army,' former Ba'athists, Iranian agents, and—most recently—'criminal elements.' The number and variety of enemies has no counterparts in the 'friends' category. With the fading of the American secular protégés, Ahmed Chalabi and Aliya Allawi, there are very few persons with whom the United States feels truly comfortable—the Kurds apart. Hence, American commanders and diplomats may soldier on stoically, but the rest of the country outside the Bush White House is at sea and apprehensive.

Deep confusion as to what's going on in Iraq now is aggravated by the widespread belief that America was duped into going to war by deceitful leaders. A further unpalatable ingredient is failure—failure to achieve, and failure to win the gratitude of the Iraqis. That is a potent brew corrosive of faith in the political system's integrity, the nation's mastery of its affairs, and the presumed selfless nature of its actions abroad. Such faith is of singular importance in America whose citizens hold tightly to an exalted self-image that stresses its virtue and competence. The simple, perhaps simplistic, truths that underlie the collective American identity as an open-hearted and open-minded communion are all cast into doubt by what is happening in and around the Persian Gulf.

Americans' much commented upon parochialism adds to the restive anxiety. Most have the barest hold on even the most basic facts concerning their country's interventions. That is so for many leaders as well as the populace at large. Putative President John McCain repeatedly puts his ignorance on display in regard to such elementary essentials as which Iraqi politicians are Sunnis and which Shi'ites, which groups he is accusing Iran of instigating, and whether the Mahdi movement was or was not provoking violence in Baghdad before the American led assault on Sadr City. His is not alone. A few years back, senior Congressmen on Intelligence committees in both Houses, and the Deputy Director of counter-terrorism at the FBI did not know whether al-Qaeda was a Sunni or Shi'ite organization. Imagine the state of disorientation in which Joe Six-pack and Sally Soccer Mom find themselves. Navigating without bearings causes anxiety and frustration. A government that has intentionally mis-programmed the GPS guidance worsens things.

The unknown breeds fear. A dull sense of history accentuates that effect by removing the possibility of reasoning by analogy. American policy-makers have had only the faintest idea of the Britain's ill-starred experience in Mesopotamia between the wars. The wise learn from others' mistakes. Even those who repeat others' errors can take some consolation from the knowledge of not being alone. Of course, the American mind denies that the failings of others are instructive for the United States. Things that happen to unexceptional nations are not supposed to happen to American—an America born under a lucky star. When they do happen, mishaps sow disquiet, incomprehension and a search for scapegoats. The planets are out of alignment. That is something frightening, if not quite dreadful.

Yet another dimension of the current deep-seated unease derives from American betrayal of its principles and ideals. Torture as a demonstrable matter of fact, torture as the official policy of the White House, torture without reasonable cause—has no precedent in America. Its routine occurrence in the 'war on terror' testifies to the amorality of those managing the country's affairs. Its tolerance by the public, by Congress, and the accessory role played by the enabling courts before, during and after the fact add up to a national pathology. For decades, Americans looked

back on the internment of fellow citizens of Japanese ancestry as an aberration which never could happen again. Now, no such assumption can be made. Imagine this picture: Iranian armies have conquered the Middle East and have reached Morocco; an Iranian armada has sunk most of the country's Atlantic fleet at anchor in Norfolk; and some hundreds of thousands of American citizens of Iranian descent live clustered on the Northeast seaboard. Is there reason to doubt that their treatment would be such as to make them envy the condition of the Japanese during WW II?

This phenomenon bespeaks stark, rooted fear. Fear of another 9/11, fear of yet greater horrors. The Bush administration, the media, and—in their own way—the cottage industry of terror specialists have stoked that fear. It has faded somewhat since March 2003. But it is still powerful enough to mask the sins of systematic torture; powerful enough to repress feelings of guilt and shame that must lie beneath the acquiescent surface. When and how they will manifest themselves is unknown. Those suppressed emotions, though, probably contribute to an element of self-doubt and a condition of low-grade dread.

The exact same politico-psychological pattern prevails in regard to the gross infringement on Americans' own civil liberties. Massive wire-tapping, eavesdropping, and infringement on the privacy of personal transactions in violation of explicit legal stipulations have been occurring routinely for years. The Bush administration audaciously claims presumptive powers of a sort associated with autocratic governments. The critical reaction has been feeble—in Congress, in the courts, in the bar associations, in the AMA, in the universities, in scholarly associations. Nearly total silence. Silence about abuse of the country's most prized, most hallowed rights. That silence proclaims loudly two things: a people living in morbid fear for which they will sacrifice their freedoms and a people whose timidity is fear by another name.

A process of *sublimation* is going on—collective and individual. Sublimation occurs when a person seeks to avoid the distress of recognizing consciously an unwelcome truth or truths. In this instance, there are several unpalatable truths: our attempt at putting the Iraqis on the path to peace and prosperity (a la Germany and Japan) has failed—America is thwarted; the Iraqis are not grateful and most of the world dislikes/hates us—Americans expect and need to be loved for our natural virtue; the terrorist threat, al-Qaeda and Osama bin-Laden are still there to bedevil us—America is unnaturally unsafe; Americans have been deceived by their President—the bond of trust central to our civic religion has been broken; we torture and we abuse others—America's moral leadership is gone; we have subverted our own liberties—we have panicked in an unmanly manner. Taken together, these failures and transgressions are a heavy load on the collective national psyche. An America that is not able, that is not moral, that is not smart, that lies, that lies to itself—that America in incompatible with the myths that sustain us.

That America has been on full display right here at home—in New Orleans - as well as in distant Mesopotamia and on the Hindu Kush borderlands. That cuts to the quick. Some, a relative few, take instrumental action through political activity. They adapt. Even fewer avoid reality by scape-goating the former, i.e. those who press us to stare bad tidings in the eye. Quite a few want to keep trying in the hope that some semblance of accomplishment could somehow justify, or at least attenuate, all the bad things. A majority sublimate—classic avoidance behavior. Personal pleasures, personal wants, personal needs squeeze out reflection on what America has been doing and what has been happening to it. The parody of Vince Lombardi's saying "when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping" uncannily touches on an awkward truth. Paradoxically, economic distress has the welcome effect of numbing whatever sensitivity to the crisis of collective self-image and self-esteem. In an odd way, the United States has eased the pain of an injured limb by hammering a thumb.

What does this mean for our theme of fear and dread? What does it mean for how America will relate to the world? American leaders and populace alike feel deep apprehension of a diffuse type at the center of which are acute specific fears. The longer this experience goes on, the more likely it is that apprehension will slip into dread for more people. That dread combines objective

elements with subjective ones. There are identifiable real dangers out there, albeit exaggerated. There also are the twin feelings that (1), we are not as good as always thought we were; and (2), I have trouble finding inside me the forthright, able and honest person I thought I was. Will we/I be up to it the next time?—and 'next times' seem more likely than they ever have since frontier days. A natural behavioral response at the policy level would be reversion - neo-isolationism as an avoidance device. It is the 'stop the world I want to get off' reaction. It is noteworthy how few public figures or citizens take this 'out.' It apparently does not meet the reality test even for the ignorant or inattentive.

Objective reality for the United States differs from the objective reality faced by others insofar as they have the option of deferring to the United States. American domination of the field of action permits their prevarication. If the United States were not the primary presence in the Persian Gulf, the rulers of Arab states would have to be far more decisive in judgment and action in regard to Iran, for example, than they now can be. European rulers would have to have to replace virtual diplomacy with the real thing.

In America, cognitive dissonance among those with some awareness of the national predicament is handled not by resolution, but rather through coping mechanisms for living with inconsistencies that are kept below a certain pain threshold. That artless strategy has proven viable in part because Americans, beguiled by their leaders and the country's entire political class, have learned to live in a virtual reality. The actual and the imagined have become fused so that the former has no clear precedence in its hold on the individual and collective mind. *This is a hallmark trait of the narcissistic personality*. Corporate narcissistic personalities do not exist. But widespread predispositions to this type of fundamental confusion do exist. They are accentuated by dissonant conditions that make escapism attractive. They are especially accentuated all the more by leaders who are themselves narcissists, beginning with President George W. Bush. His mindset, his rhetoric, his systematic elisions—echoed daily by his entourage and his feudal host in the media; confirmed by a craven, disoriented 'opposition'—have served to keep his personality together, and they have served his political interests. In the process, the American peoples' already shaky hold on the truth has been weakened.

As has been said in another context, "his own grip on truth or falsity is so fluid, so subservient to his desires, that it matters little to him what is true and what is false; so he is able to act as if something is true if that serves his purposes best. Belief has become a creature of his will: he will treat an unfounded suspicion as if it were a Cartesian certainty. He has contempt for people who are candid and trusting, who can respect the truth."[1] The latter, in any event, were thin on the ground before this act in the national drama began; now, they are on the point of extinction.

The next President, Barack Obama in all likelihood, will enter the White House with wide popular support and goodwill. He will have no specific mandate, though, as to the agonizing issues of the Middle East. His popularity will be based mainly on his personality and his being non-Bush. The dispositions of most public opinion are clear: do something to end the Iraq imbroglio but don't do anything that embarrasses the United States; pursue a more multilateral tack but don't forget American exceptionalism and safeguard our right to take action as we see fit; steer clear of open-ended nation-building projects, except where they create bulwarks against terrorists—e.g., Afghanistan; spent less money abroad, we need it at home; make us popular in the world again. On torture, there is no prevailing disposition. Opinion is split, and so are many individuals in their own thinking/feeling. 'Make us safe but don't shame us' is merely an expression of cognitive dissonance. Overall, the public offers little much guidance on torture than on how to untangle our multiple, intersecting dilemmas in the Greater Middle East.

Leadership can be critical to resolving cognitive dissonance, for overcoming fear and dissipating dread. Let us remember Franklin Roosevelt's stentorian admonition: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself; unreasoning, unjustified fear."[2] FDR aimed at people's emotions. Action is the required follow-up in order to keep fear at bay, action that seemingly can deal with its causes.

Leadership up to the task at hand is in short supply—in the Middle East, in the United States or in Western Europe (where it is non-existent). For leaders to manage conditions of fear and dread effectively, they must execute a sustained strategy at home and abroad, in synch.

Sadly, the presidential candidates have not prepared the ground for such a daunting challenge in their failure to address frontally hard truths. For months they seemed to be living in a bubble as insular as that of the White House. Only Barack Obama's allusions to possible talks with the Iranian leadership are an exception to this generality. Focus groups or 'expert' advisors attuned only to the tactical needs of the aspirants are of little more value for a serious rethink of interests and strategy than Karen Hughes.

The evasiveness of campaigning politicians stems from frightened thinking of a more banal sort, i.e. the fear of saying something that some slice of the voters might find objectionable and which can make the candidate a target of an opponent's slander campaign. This is the electoral equivalent of the 'prevent defense' in football that ensures so many fourth quarter reversals. The unhappy consequences in national politics are twofold: the foundations have not been laid—in terms of popular understanding and support—for serious policy departures; and valuable time for embarking on complex diplomatic projects is lost as the process must begin after inauguration day. Haste, under those conditions, can mean tempting the political fates at home.

Failure to raise these issues in the political discourse means digging ourselves a deeper hole. The next President, who will be anything but a heroic figure, will be handicapped further by: the absence of an Iraq debate that gets beyond calendars; the utter lack of strategic perspective; the consonant inability of the American public to understand the truly significant choices and trade-offs to be made; and a diplomacy hamstrung by the precipitous loss of American credibility and moral authority.

The sky may be falling next January in the Middle East—if not sooner. We are utterly unprepared for it intellectually, politically, diplomatically—or in the hearts and minds of a people riddled with fear and dreading the future.

Europe

Dread is integral to the European psyche. It is a many-faceted dread, a dread so well sublimated that its effects on conscious thinking goes unrecognized. It is never articulated. Its sources are past traumas and present fears. A crucial enabling factor is Europeans' complete reliance on, and deference to the United States. Consequently, the Europe of the EU has placed its fate in the hands of others. This condition also strengthens the position of America that can count on near automatic backing from its principal allies. The peculiarities of this situation are twofold: this self-abnegation is incommensurate with European governments' potential ability to exert considerable influence beyond their borders; and foregoing the effort to control one's destiny on matters of evident consequence is not producing overt anxiety either among leaders or publics.

How do we explain these oddities? First, Europe is inhibited by historical memory, by moral uncertainty and by political habit. In critical respects, Europeans have freed themselves from the dead hand of the past. The postwar European community-building project was inspired to a large degree by the conviction that the continent's collective history was the common enemy. It has succeeded admirably. Today's politics has both benefited and been handicapped by that success. Gone are the overblown ambitions and lethal rivalries. If the United States was born against the grain of other peoples' history, post-war Europe was reborn in rejection of its own turbulent history. Europe is at once post-modern and post-heroic. Gone are a sense of purpose and direction. Continental European polities are suspended somewhere between a national past and a truly supranational future. The new Europe was made possible more by a process of political subtraction than political addition. That is to say, the domination of public affairs by prosaic

concerns and tame ambitions has allowed Europeans to shed those parts of their make-up that would have impeded the integration process. Moreover, the need to make hard choices, to pronounce and to act are not felt as imperative when the United States, for better or worse, has been handling matters beyond Europe.

Members of these civilian societies have found it convenient to live under America's protective umbrella and in America's diplomatic shadow. The outcome is *a classic dominant-subordinate relationship* that has outlived the Cold War realities. It is one that continues to inflect their interaction and impinges as well on the Europeans' sense of self along with their aptitude for autonomous behavior. Such a long hiatus in exercising normal powers of sovereignty, set in the broader context of overweening American political and intellectual influence, inescapably has created a culture of inequality. It affects all parties in the Euro-American world. Perhaps most debilitating is the sense that what Europe decides, what it does—or even whether it does nothing at all—cannot determine its future. That is because a willful America pronounces on the matters that count most, because Europe is unable to counteract or deflect it, and thus in some profound way Europe is irrelevant to the great issues of the day. There could be no better example of a self-fulfilling, if silent, prophecy.

Europe is unduly meek, tentative and uncertain. This is an area where style and substance, form and function, are intertwined. A noticeable, costly manifestation of inadequate European self-confidence is the vacillation and inconsistency is assessing threat. The swing from understated to overstated threat is evident in governments' post-9/11 reactions. Publicly temperate, privately (one might say clandestinely) they have been extreme. Complicity in American extraordinary-rendition is the most striking instance. It is the behavior of the fearful not the convinced. To change it, Europe should reject the myth of impotence—a myth whose acceptance is as disingenuous as it is tempting for the fearful. European self-doubts are on vivid display in the EU's vapid diplomatic activity in the Middle East. Envoys are constantly on the move. Movement is one thing, action that might accomplish is something else. In Iraq, Europe's contribution to the outcome of what all now declare a matter of historic consequence is nil. America acts as it sees fit, Europe prays that the results will be less than disastrous. On Palestine, European leaders have followed the American line (itself an emulation of the Israeli line) on isolating Hamas and punishing Gazans. The results have been predictably counterproductive. Hamas is stronger, Abbas is weaker, and the peace process is up a blind alley. Previous European sensitivity to the Palestinian cause has been put in suspension so as not to irk the Americans. Euro-American cordiality is so highly prized that Europe has sacrificed the last modicum of independence in its cause.

On Iran, the European troika of Britain, France and German—and then the EU officially—have engaged the Iranians in talks on their nuclear program for years now. It is cause for much congratulation among European political classes. While the negotiations may have bought some time in postponing American and/or Israeli strikes against Iran, they never had the slightest chance of resolving the issue. The simple reason is that what the Iranians want in exchange for foregoing the nuclear option cannot be delivered by the Europeans. Only the United States can provide the security guarantees, political recognition, and other pieces of a 'grand bargain' in the Gulf region. Everyone there and in Washington knows this to be so. European government leaders and Dr. Solana, too, may realize it deep down. On the surface, they are content to pursue the mirage while bowing with gratification to the local European applause that the pursuit engenders. Solana trudges to Teheran with his latest 'last offer' in a ritual of futile, sterile diplomatic demarches. The EU proclaims its unity. Solidarity in error is no virtue, however.

Another, congruent sentiment that explains European self-effacement is to see Europe's own history as somehow aberrant. The endemic strife that marked intra-European relations is universally viewed as something that contemporary Europe has outgrown. By implication, it is believed that other countries who occupy less tidy precincts would do well to learn Europe's lessons of conflict overcome and relegated to the archives of historical memory. The limitation of

this approach to international politics lies in its inattentiveness to the passions and calculated ambitions that fueled Europe's wars. They are bundled together as one intensely negative reference point. Europeans suffer from an *Orpheus complex*: they fear that were they to break stride to look over their shoulder at the hell from which they are now liberated, they could be cast back into the underworld's nether reaches. Yet, metaphorically, that is the domain inhabited by many of those they encounter 'out there.' To peruse Europe's past is not a morbid, unhealthy activity much less does it risk stirring up old ghosts. Instead, it is a responsible way to gain perspective on oneself and on what moves others. Only then can Europeans take purposeful action with a measure of confidence in their ability to achieve real successes.

Europe and America have become enablers of each other's dysfunctional behavior. American impulsive activism, domineering attitude and supreme self-confidence induce Europeans to indulge their penchant for passive deference. Their lack of self-assertion and ever-readiness to give Washington the benefit of the doubt, in turn, encourages American leaders to treat them as subordinates Washington's ultimate blackmail weapon is the unspoken threat of leaving Europeans, and the world it inhabits, to their own devices. European dread of an American reversion to isolationism is as pervasive and profound as it is baseless. The fears evoked by the prospect that the United States' power will be retracted lurks in the background of every transatlantic crisis. Yet, there is no evidence or logic that suggests it is at all likely—no matter what Europe does.

There is a yet another feature of the present political environment in Europe that stands in the way of both the enhancement of Brussels institutions and self-assertion internationally. I refer to the widening gap between European publics and government leaders. The widespread feeling that the latter are inattentive and unresponsive to popular sentiment is much commented upon, primarily in reference to the Constitutional issue. Less recognized is the discrepancy in attitudes toward world problems. This is unmistakable with reference to trust in the United States generally and the related issues of Palestine and Iraq in particular. It is most striking in the strong revulsion against rendition/torture juxtaposed to the studied denial and avoidance behavior of leaders. Whereas governments offer active or tacit support to the American position, heavy majorities in nearly all European countries see it as counterproductive if not downright dangerous. This is true in Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and France (now that Mr. Sarkozy has tilted the Elysee towards the Bush White House). In theory, public opinion so disposed potentially could facilitate greater expression of European independence on foreign policy. The choice of leaders to move in the opposite direction lowers the trust and deference accorded decision-makers, thereby further reducing the latter's inclination to exercise a higher degree of autonomy.

What is to be Done

Observing the above admonitions of what not to do clears the way for the fresh intellectual excursions that must precede policy innovations better able to satisfy needs. What guidelines can mark out that course? First, tangible actions taken with conviction on matters of consequence are the indispensable building-blocks for a credible, meaningful CFSP. Policies that are mainly rhetorical, policies that center on marginal issues, policies that insert themselves into the seams of American diplomacy—none have the potential either to bolster European self-confidence or to win respect abroad. Nor can they resolve any of the serious challenges to major interests. Repeated declaration in favor of the road-map to peace and justice in the Holy Land; assuming the custodial responsibility for Kosovo, Ilofor, etc. are incapable of changing anything fundamental. By contrast, taking steps to engage the Hamas leadership, to confront Russia on the rules of the politico-economic game with the EU, to pursue serious European ideas about a stable Persian Gulf region—these would reverberate in foreign capitals (including Washington) while strengthening Europeans' sense of themselves as politically mature participants in determining their own future.

To continue along a course that features half-measures, thin consensus, allergy to confrontation with anyone, and instinctive deference to whomever occupies the White House promises perpetuation of the current state of affairs. If one judges that the present course is one that best serves Europe's interests today, and can do so in the future, then the issue of a difficult break from the past is not cogent. If, on the other hand, continuation along the inertial path is judged unsatisfactory, there is no acceptable alternative than to take one's destiny in hand—nettles and all.

Elite feelings of acting under urgent pressure stand in contrast to public stoicism. European publics are overwhelmingly opposed to extraordinary rendition, associated torture, and American policy in Iraq. This is not a matter where citation of the need to mollify public feeling can be credibly made. A finer sense of proportion is in order. Dangers emanating from the Islamic world are real and important. But Western civilization will endure, and likely continue to thrive, whatever the outcome of enterprises to track down the Taliban in the Hindu Kush; to foster a decent government in Baghdad; or even to dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Franklin Roosevelt's words about "fear itself"[3] are even more pertinent to Europe today than to America. Exaggerated fear can be paralyzing; it can produce misguided actions; it can lead us to do things contrary to our nature; it can make us at once rash and craven. Reasoned, thoughtful appraisal of those things we rightfully should fear is the basis for effective action. It comes is a product of measured self-confidence, and itself generates healthy self-confidence. That is the virtuous circle an outward looking Europe should strive for.

A second ingredient necessary for Europe to become an actor who counts on the world stage is political courage. That is a potentially inflammable term. So, I hasten to say that it is not a reiteration of the 'Venus' vs. 'Mars' formulation. That overworked notion is simplistic, and of little more analytical value than the coarser ascriptions to Europeans of a debilitating softness accompanied by elastic moral standards. What I mean by political courage is two things: foremost is the intellectual courage to speak candidly to others, and to one's own peoples, about what Europe's stakes in external developments are, the tough and risky decisions that have to be made, why consensus is highly desirable but may be unreachable, and all that is entailed in trying to exert influence that matches Europe's place in the world. Too, courage is to recognize the difference in moral thinking as applicable to intra-community affairs and as applicable to the harsher spheres of international politics.

Clarifying the moral calculus relevant to various sorts of international engagements is essential because of the current confusion and ambivalence as what is justifiable intervention. All automatically use the vocabulary of political morality but most are ill-equipped, and therefore ill-prepared to explain the interplay among humanistic, security, political, and economic considerations typical of pressing issues from Darfur, to Palestine, to Iraq, to the Persian Gulf, to Russia. The objective should be to raise consciousness to the point where it enables European countries to move beyond the limiting choices of abstention, deference, or disjointed action.

Conclusion

Fear can evoke heroism—witness Britain in 1940-41 under Churchill's inspiring leadership. That may occur when the threat is tangible, immediate and can be dealt with by means within one's capacity, however strained. By contrast, intangible, multiple, indirect threats in complex circumstances where the willful actions of other parties narrow what you can do, sap confidence and will. Where you have reason to doubt yourself—due to acute historical memory, chronic indecision and/or cognitive dissonance, dread sets in. Its symptoms are feelings of impotence and an atrophy of action. As a result, we are all in danger of going over the cliff together.

In the Middle East today, only the United States has the will to act. Its confidence is flagging, though. Too, it actions since 2001 have created for America intractable problems for which there

is no solution. Losses must be cut, trade-offs made, errors of judgment and commission recognized, coping strategies devised and executed. That is extremely hard for a nation constituted as is the United States to do. Yet, until it embarks on such a course that is as prudent as it is bold, everybody else will remain rigidified, timid, increasingly frightened and, in the end, accepting of a fate it no longer feels about to influence.

This state of affairs is probably unique in history. Hence, we have no precedents offering clues as to how it could turn out otherwise. Nor does the past provide much guidance for either the United States or those leaders who live in its shadow. Interestingly, the one exception may be Iran. Teheran's leadership is disparate. That is evident in its tactics and rhetoric. At the strategic plane, however, there is a discernible logic and coherence.

Iran's goals are clear:

1. Establish and maintain a strong position in the Persian Gulf while aiming to acquire an effective veto over what other powers do;
2. Keep open the nuclear option:
3. As an adjunct, maximize influence farther afield in the Islamic world via reputation, sustenance to Shi'ite movements and a well modulated, existential threat;
4. Use an active diplomacy to bring into play others powers whose own self-interests somehow converge with yours, e.g. the European Union, Russia, China, India, Pakistan;
5. Accumulate an array of cards that can be played to forestall an American/Israeli military campaign against you, e.g. oil, links to all Shi'ite factions in Iraq, inspiring yet cautious godfather to Shi'ites in the Gulf, capacity for being a spoiler in Afghanistan; and
6. Stay patient, a new administration in Washington could change the complexion of the game markedly.

It is an elaborate strategy that Iran has pursued skillfully despite the liability represented by the vituperative, disreputable President Ahmedi-nejad. Teheran has been ruthless: sacrificing Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi movement so as to deny the Americans an excuse to attack, and so as to keep leverage with the Maliki/Hakim government at a time when the truly critical issue is the terms of a U.S.-Iraqi security treaty. Teheran has been ingenious: in its prolonged dance of the seven veils that keeps the IAEA and the Europeans hopeful while assiduously avoiding any concession that could cripple its nuclear program. Teheran has been pragmatic: in cultivating Sunni regimes in an attempt to forestall their becoming implacable enemies and proponents of air strikes. Teheran, above all, has kept its nerve rather than yield to fear and dread.

Iran's impressive tightrope act has lessons for others. This praise is for Teheran's deft and steadfast diplomacy, not for its clerical regime and ambitions.

How odd to conclude an essay on fear and dread with a positive comment on the ingenuity and cool-headedness of a country more vulnerable and isolated than any other. For it is not the Iranians who are extraordinary; it is the other governments of the region, of Europe, and of America that are so wanting.

References

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